

1890

1891

1892



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Curios and Relics

Tools

Ox Yoke

Made by Lincoln

Excerpts from newspapers and other sources

From the files of the
Lincoln Financial Foundation Collection

LINCOLN MADE THE OX-YOKE.

Proof of the Authenticity of a Notable Relic.

SPECIAL DISPATCH TO THE GLOBE-DEMOCRAT.

MATTOON, ILL., November 24.—For several years there has been in one of the museums at the University of Illinois an ox-yoke, which, when pointed out by a university guide to visitors at the institution, was said to have been made by Abraham Lincoln. Several months ago a doubting Thomas appeared, and the authenticity of the ox-yoke was questioned. Several of the professors who had been with the university for a great many years were approached for information concerning the ox-yoke, and while some of them "knew" that the story that it had been made by President Lincoln was true, none of them were able to throw enough light on the subject to convince any one else who might have a doubt in his mind. No one could remember exactly who brought the yoke to the institution, and while the traditions were strong and in a great measure were believed, still there was no positive proof. The students were skeptical, proof was wanting, and proof President Draper determined to have. From an unexpected source it came when the university authorities had about concluded that no proof could be obtained.

Some weeks since, Mr. Watson Pickerell, of Tempe, Arizona, a graduate of the class of 1875, wrote to Dean Burrill that he had given the yoke to the university and knew all about its history. Correspondence was taken up with Mr. Pickerell, and resulted in his sending the following affidavit to President Draper:

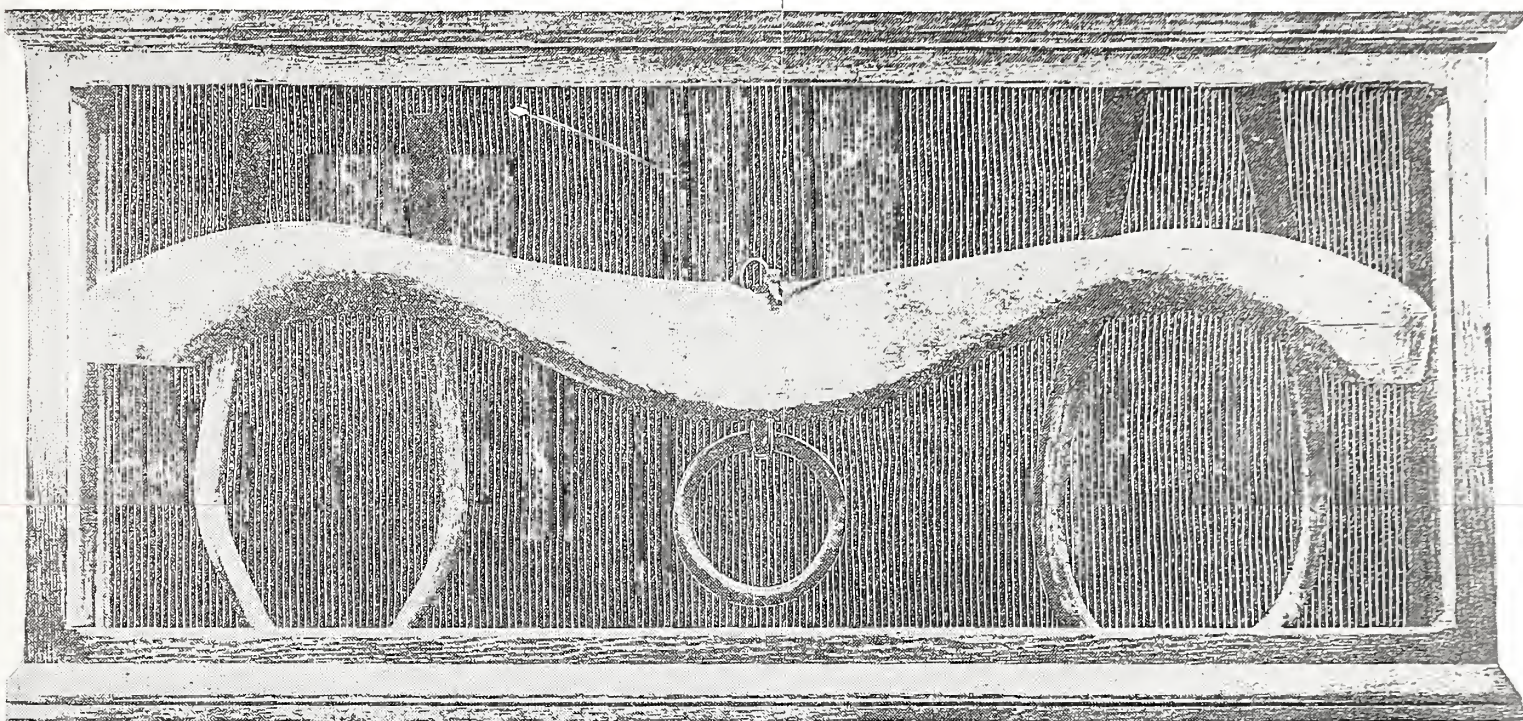
"United States of America, Territory of Arizona, County of Maricopa, ss.—Watson Pickerell, being duly sworn, says that he is a graduate of the University of Illinois, in the class of 1875, and is now a resident of the City of Tempe, Territory of Arizona; that in the year 1875 he presented to the University of Illinois an ox-yoke made by Abraham Lincoln, the authenticity of which is based upon the following facts, name'y: That the yoke was given to this deponent by Mr. Clark M. Smith, late of the City of Springfield, Ill.; that Mr. Smith was a brother-in-law of Mr. Lincoln and a man of well known and high repute; and Mr. Smith stated to deponent that very soon after Mr. Lincoln returned to Illinois from his term in Congress Mr. Lincoln and he (Smith) together visited New Salem, Menard County, Ill., where Mr. Lincoln once lived; that while there they attended a public auction of farm chattels, among which was the ox-yoke; that the yoke was announced at the auction in the presence of Mr. Lincoln as having been made by Mr. Lincoln; and that the announcement made was acknowledged by him as true; that it was looked upon and talked about as a curiosity because made by a Congressman; that Mr. Smith bid off the yoke at said auction and retained the said yoke in his possession until he gave it to deponent; that Mr. Smith also stated to deponent that at the time of buying the yoke he had no thought that Mr. Lincoln would ever become President, but that thought the yoke worth buying and keeping as a souvenir, because made by his brother-in-law and a former member of Congress. WATSON PICKERELL."

This is attested by Charles C. Wolfe, a notary public of Maricopa, Arizona Territory, October 6, 1900.

11/25/00 Nov 25 1900

OX-YOKE MADE BY ABRAHAM LINCOLN

NOW IN THE POSSESSION OF THE UNIVERSITY OF ILLINOIS



Photographed for The Tribune by the Department of Photography of the University of Illinois.

AMONG the treasures of the University of Illinois none is so eagerly sought for by visitors as the old ox-yoke made by President Lincoln. The yoke was made by Lincoln at New Salem, Ill., probably about 1830, and when Lincoln was about 21 years old. It remained there until about 1849, just after Lincoln returned from his only term in Congress. Then Lincoln and his brother-in-law, Clark M. Smith, visited New Salem together. While there the two attended an auction sale of farm chattels, among which was the ox-yoke. When the yoke was offered for sale it was treated as a novelty because made by a Congressman. Lincoln acknowledged it as his work, and Mr. Smith, saying "it was, worth taking home as a souvenir because made by his brother-in-law and a member of Congress," bid it off and carried it home. When Lincoln became the Republican nominee for the Presidency the ox-

yoke gained added significance. Mr. Smith got it out and placed it in the counting-room of his firm. The firm was C. M. Smith & Co., and composed of Mr. Smith and Mr. John S. Condell, engaged in the shoe and leather business at Springfield.

The yoke was there an object of much interest for a long time. In 1873 Mr. Watson Pickrell, a student at the University of Illinois, now living at the City of Tempe, Ariz., urged Mr. Smith to give it to the university. He finally concluded to do so, and Mr. Pickrell carried it to Champaign. The cross-bar is black walnut; the bows are of hickory. As will be seen by the photograph just taken for THE TRIBUNE by the photographic department of the university, it is in excellent

preservation. The university has religiously cared for it for twenty-seven years, and holds it among its most sacred possessions.

The case in which the yoke is kept is made of oak boards from the floor of the Lincoln home in Springfield, which were kindly procured for the university by State Auditor James S. McCullough.

Mr. Condell of the firm of C. M. Smith & Co. is yet living in Springfield, and the following affidavits, which President Draper has recently procured from him and Mr. Pickrell, fully authenticate the facts.

United States of America, Territory of Arizona, County of Maricopa, ss.: Watson Pickrell, being duly sworn, says that he is a graduate of the University of Illinois, in the class of 1875, and is now a resident of the City of Tempe, Territory of Arizona; that in the year 1873 he presented to the University of Illinois an ox-yoke made by Abraham Lincoln; that his knowledge of the said ox-yoke was made by Mr. Lincoln is based upon the following facts—namely: that the yoke was given to this deponent by Mr. Clark M. Smith, late of the City of Springfield, Ill.; that Mr. Smith was a brother-in-law of Mr. Lincoln, and a man of well-known and high repute; that Mr. Smith stated to deponent that soon after Mr. Lincoln returned to Illinois from his term in Congress, Mr. Lincoln and he (Smith) together visited near New Salem, Menard County, Ill., where Mr. Lincoln once lived; that while there they attended a public auction of farm chattels, among which was the ox-yoke; that the yoke was announced at the auction, in the presence of Mr. Lincoln, as having been made by Mr. Lincoln, and that the announcement was by him

acknowledged as true; that it was looked upon and talked about as a curiosity because made by a Congressman; that Mr. Smith bid off the yoke at said auction and retained the same in his possession until he gave it to deponent; that Mr. Smith also stated to deponent that at the time of buying the yoke he had no thought that Mr. Lincoln would ever become President, but that he thought the yoke was worth buying and keeping as a souvenir because made by his brother-in-law and a former member of Congress.

WATSON PICKRELL.

I, Charles C. Woolf, a notary public, in the County of Maricopa and Territory of Arizona, hereby certify that on the 6th day of October, in the year 1900, there appeared before me Mr. Watson Pickrell, known to me to be the person who signed the above statement and acknowledged that he signed the same, and upon being duly sworn by me said that the statements therein contained were true.

In witness whereof I hereunto set my hand and attach the seal of my office at the City of Tempe, county and Territory aforesaid, this 6th day of October, 1900.

My commission expires on Feb. 11, 1902.

[Seal.] CHAS. C. WOOLF, Notary Public.

State of Illinois, County of Sangamon, ss.: John S. Condell Sr., being duly sworn, says that he is a resident of the City of Springfield, Ill.; that in 1873, and for several years previous, he was the

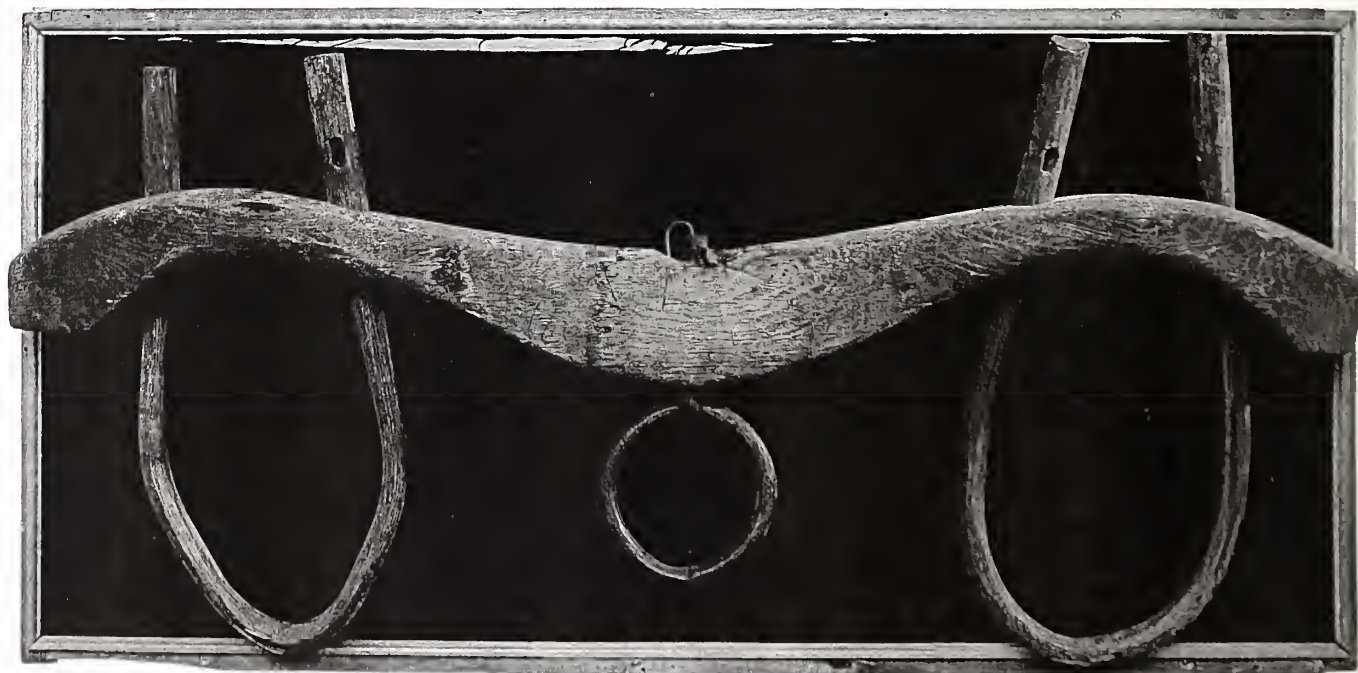
business partner of Mr. Clark M. Smith, the brother-in-law of President Lincoln, under the firm name of C. M. Smith & Co.; that during said years there was in their store an ox-yoke which was frequently the subject of conversation, and that Mr. Smith frequently stated that it was made by Mr. Lincoln when a young man living at New Salem, Ill.; that he (Smith) bought the same as a souvenir at an auction at New Salem soon after Mr. Lincoln's return from Congress, and upon the occasion of a visit to New Salem by Mr. Lincoln and himself; that the yoke was bought in Mr. Lincoln's presence after the public statement that it was made by him and he had acknowledged that the statement was true; that said yoke was in the attic of the store for a long time, but that it became an object of interest and value, and was cleaned up and kept in the counting-room for several years; that Mr. Smith took great pleasure in showing it to his friends, especially to farmer customers, and giving them its history and telling them how it came into his possession at New Salem; that Mr. Smith frequently had conversations with Mr. Watson Pickrell, a student at the State University, about giving the yoke to said university, and finally yielded to Mr. Pickrell's request that he should do so, and allowed Mr. Pickrell to take the yoke and present it to the university as coming from Mr. Smith, and that Mr. Pickrell took it away for that purpose.

JOHN S. CONDELL SR.

The Ox-Yoke and the Researcher as Detective

A large ox-yoke, purportedly carved by Lincoln when he was living in New Salem, Illinois, was donated to the new Illinois Industrial University (later called the University of Illinois) in 1873, but it was a generation later before convincing details about its authenticity were actually gathered and publicized.

By the late nineteenth century, Thomas Jonathan Burrill, the distinguished botanist and dean of the faculty and the Graduate College, had been making inquiries about the ox-yoke, to no avail. The details finally began to unfold as a result of a letter printed in the *Springfield News*, Oct. 20, 1900, by former reporter Laurence Hamilton. While visiting Arizona, Hamilton happened to run into an 1875 graduate of the university, Watson Pickrell. Pickrell told Hamilton that he had given the ox-yoke to the university in 1873, after it had been given to him by Clark M. Smith, a Springfield resident married to Mary Todd Lincoln's sister.



This wooden ox-yoke was crafted by the young Abraham Lincoln, as Lincoln himself acknowledged when it was auctioned in 1840. The university received it as a gift in 1873. The frame is made of wood from the original flooring of Lincoln's Springfield home.

YOKE MADE BY LINCOLN

The souvenirs of Lincoln's residence in Indiana are many. He worked as a farmer, carpenter, ferryman, and general helper throughout the neighborhood.

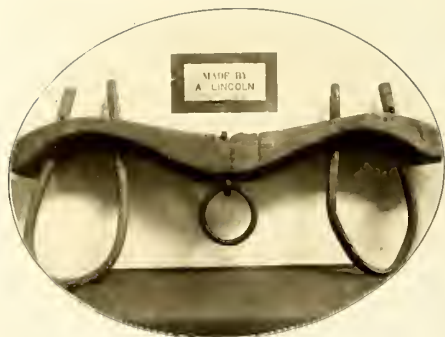
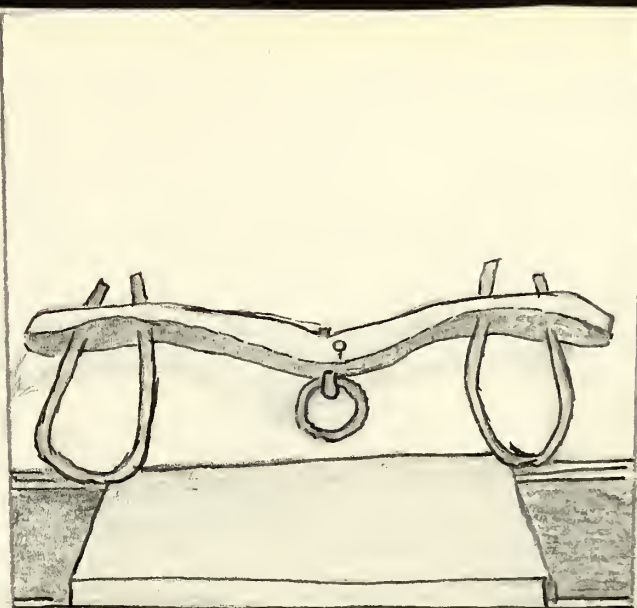


FIG. 10. Yoke of H. W. F. Co., Esq., De Kalb, Ill.

A YOKER WHICH IS TREASURED AS AN EXAMPLE OF LINCOLN'S
CRAFTSMANSHIP



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